

AIDS cure unlikely, Koop says

By JEFFREY POTTS
Staff writer

RANCHO MIRAGE — Former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, perhaps the nation's most influential surgeon general ever, said Friday he was pessimistic on whether a cure for AIDS would be found.

"I'm very pessimistic as to whether and when," Koop said at a press conference at Eisenhower Medical Center. Koop and his staff put out two reports on the AIDS virus during his tenure.

Koop was in town to speak at the Third International Conference on Continuing Medical Education.

"I don't think people realize that even if we have a vaccine for AIDS on the horizon, it won't be like, for example, a polio vaccine. There are so many things about the virus, and how it affects the cells of patients, that we can't expect the same kind of immunity to develop from the (AIDS) vaccine."

Koop also cited the difficulty of

vaccinating the entire population because of public perception that only homosexuals acquire the virus and therefore are the only people who need the vaccine.

"I think we have to recognize that because of the stigma attached to the virus, anyone vaccinated would have to be HIV positive," he said.

But despite the severity of the AIDS epidemic, Koop said smoking is still the number one health problem in the United States. He said some 380,000 deaths a year in the U.S. are attributable to smoking.

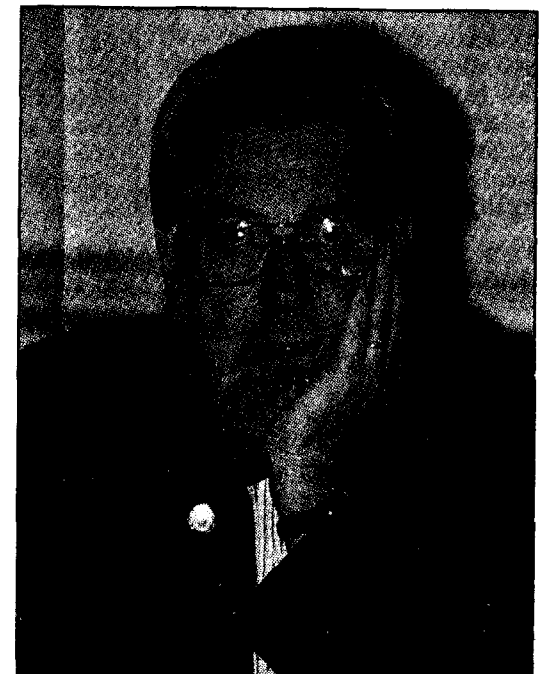
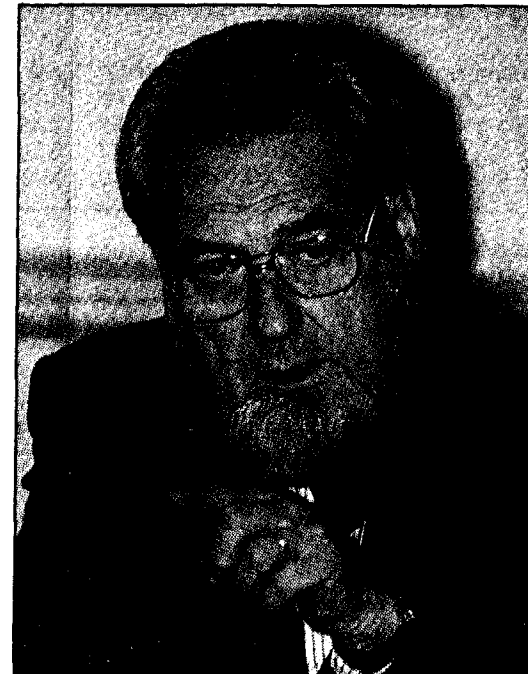
Koop, who during his tenure led an aggressive campaign against smoking, attacked the tobacco industry for its misleading advertis-

ing schemes.

"It is a \$5 billion to \$7 billion industry that is flourishing by lots of advertising that even by their own statements is unethical," Koop said. "Tobacco is never good for anybody."

Koop said that although consumption of cigarettes in the U.S. is

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RODRIGO PENA/Staff photographer

THREE FACES OF KOOP: Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop talks at Eisenhower Medical Center on Friday.

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C. Everett Koop

Koop

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dropping, the industry is now turning to foreign markets, where it can capitalize on societies less informed on the dangers of smoking.

"The impact there (in foreign countries) is immediate and se-

vere," he said.

Koop said the boom of the cigarette industry in the early 1970's can be likened to the growth that is now being seen in the alcohol industry in the late 1980's.

He said about 18 percent of all people in the U.S. who drink alcohol abuse it.

The former surgeon general said he has urged the alcohol industry to refrain from gearing their products to the teenagers who are more susceptible to addiction, and with some success.

"All I'm asking them to do is not advertise to young people and not make it seem as if their success in

business, sports, etcetera, depends on whether they drink or not," Koop said.

The five-day conference began Thursday and ends Monday. Dozens of physicians and medical experts

from around the world attended the conference to debate and exchange ideas on medical education.